

White Paper Report

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National Endowment for the Humanities

Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections

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Planning Archival Storage in the Historic Sanborn House

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

GRANT 10752638

Town of Winchester, Massachusetts

Planning Archival Storage in the Historic Sanborn House

Project overview

In summer 2010, the Town of Winchester received \$35,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to plan a storage facility for its consolidated historical collections. Project funds were used to engage a team of experts in the fields of conservation, archival practice, architecture, and engineering to work with the Town of Winchester's Clerk, Archival Center, and the Winchester Historical Society. They were charged with developing plans and specifications for a storage facility on the ground floor of the Sanborn House, a National Register building currently being restored as a cultural and historical center with funding from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, foundations, and private donors.

The planning process focused on a review of collections storage needs and the building envelope. Two outside consultants provided their expertise:

- Melissa Mannon, Archivist and Cultural Heritage Consultant, ArchivesINFO
- Solomon Bauer Giambastiani Architects

End products included a report on archival storage needs, an inventory of records with space estimates, and a comprehensive architectural study with plans and preliminary cost estimates. The NEH Final Report submitted in June 2013 describes the grant process in detail and includes all three reports as appendices. This white paper focuses on issues and solutions that confront an institution seeking to adapt an historically significant structure for archival storage.

Background

One of the challenges facing towns in Massachusetts is the long-term preservation of rich historical collections of town records in a state that does not accept town records into its State Archives but does mandate, without funding, strict guidelines for vault storage within each locality. In addition to government records, the Winchester Archival Center also holds photographs, documents, and special collections.

The Town stores its archives and special collections in an office and vaults in the basement of Town Hall, built in 1888 and restored in 1985. Space is a problem as is the location of Town Hall on the flood plain of the Aberjona River. To find a solution, the Town partnered with the Winchester Historical Society to assess whether the Sanborn House, a town property leased to the Society for its headquarters, would be a better place to store historical collections and increase use of an architecturally significant building. Preliminary environmental monitoring showed the basement to be dry and naturally cool, but the building posed challenges for access and for retrofitting a vault into an older building and expertise was required.

Winchester has taken a collaborative approach toward the management of its historical resources. The Winchester Historical Society, Town Clerk, Archival Center, and Public Library created the Collaborative for Documenting Winchester History. In 2005 the Town received an NEH Preservation Assistance Grant, which resulted in the preservation needs assessment that laid the groundwork for the current project. The group continues to work on a coordinated policies and public programs for the Town's historical collections.

Activities

Archives

Melissa Mannon was selected as the Archival Consultant for the project because of her extensive experience working with the Town of Winchester and its collections. Ms. Mannon provided training to archives volunteers as part of 2004 Massachusetts Historic Records Advisory Board grant and conducted a preservation survey of Town Hall, Sanborn House, and Winchester Public Library as part of a 2005 NEH Preservation Assistance Grant.

For this project, Ms. Mannon surveyed current storage in the Town Hall vaults and the Sanborn House and developed space estimates for long-term storage of the collections housed in these locations. She tabulated her findings in cubic foot measurements by

collection so that we could distinguish between Town records, required to be stored in vaults that meet the specifications of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and historical records not under this mandate.

Environmental Monitoring

Conservator Nancy Schrock set up an environmental monitoring program for the Town Hall vaults and sites in the Sanborn House. She used Hobo U12 Temperature and Relative Humidity Dataloggers and Hoboware software to download and graph findings. Ms. Schrock attended IPI's Preservation Management Training courses led by James Reilly.

Architectural Study

The Town prepared an RFP for the architectural firm, interviewed applicants, and selected Solomon & Bauer & Giambastiani (SBG) of Watertown, Massachusetts. The firm has had considerable experience with historic preservation and museums, including projects resulting from building environment and collections storage assessments funded by grants from the NEA, NEH, and IMLS. Design of collections storage systems is one of their sub-specialties so they were prepared to incorporate environmental standards for heritage collections and sustainable practice in building design. Lawrence Bauer, Principal, served as lead architect.

SBG verified the space estimates of the Archival Consultant and worked with the Project Team to define the project objective, "to integrate the Archive Center comprised of archival vault, collection areas, and research space, into the lower level of the Sanborn House in the most logical and cost effective way, while respecting the historical fabric of the building." The space needs were defined as:

- Vault storage of 400 sq. ft. in compliance *with Technical Bulletin 1, Massachusetts Archives, Performance Standards of Safes and Vaults*
- Additional storage space for documents, photographs, oversize flat paper material, and artifacts according to recommended standards for security and environmental control of archival materials
- Work space for processing and research
- Elevator to move materials and provide access to people
- Upgrades to stairways to meet code

To perform a comprehensive conditions assessment of the existing structure of the Sanborn House basement, SGB enlisted the consulting services of:

- Structure North Consulting Engineers Structural Concept
- Exergen BSD HVAC and Climate Control
- R.W. Sullivan Engineering Plumbing and Fire Protection
- Thompson Engineering Company Electrical Concept

The Code Group of R. W. Sullivan Engineering also provided a detailed code and accessibility analysis, which formed the basis for the feasibility study. SBG combined the results of these studies with the requirements of the Massachusetts Historical Commission not to change the exterior appearance of the historic building or the original interior details in the public rooms (library, study, dining room, and music room).

The results were presented to the Project Team on August 9, 2012. The grant plan of work had requested two alternatives to evaluate. In fact, only one design was possible without destroying the front rooms and exterior detailing or violating codes. The Project Team approved the presented concept and authorized preparation of the final report.

SGB presented the final proposal to the Project Team, Town Manager, and President of the Winchester Historical Society on January 15, 2013.

Accomplishments

The Archives Consultant produced a comprehensive report, which has already produced improvements to the storage and management of the archives collection (see Immediate Impact). Having accurate projections for individual collections will help plan interim storage and organization.

The Conservator's environmental monitoring program confirmed problems with the large vault in Town Hall and confirmed cool conditions in the Sanborn House basement. Monitoring will remain a part of ongoing management of both places. By putting the data on

the eClimate Notebook website, the Town Engineer, Town Clerk, and Sanborn House Site Manager will be able to access data.

The SGB Feasibility Study concluded, "It is technically and spatially feasible to adapt the existing basement for use as an Archive Center, provide for future growth, and to achieve compliance for the Archive Center and Sanborn House in general." The design meets all the program requirements and provides universal access to all three levels of the building." Achieving this demanded an understanding relevant code requirements and developing solutions to complex problems:

- Creating a 6-hour fireproof vault for town records was the most difficult challenge because of the state requirements and the space limitations in the basement. As a result, the vault must be constructed in-situ, which means protecting the rest of the building from moisture as poured concrete dries. This space will have its own dedicated HVAC system and compact shelving to maximize storage space.
- Providing full access to all public spaces as outlined the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) Rules and Regulations. The first floor of the Sanborn House currently meets these rules, but opening the basement to use triggers the requirement to make the both the basement and second floor accessible. In addition to re-doing one set of stairs to the basement, it will be necessary to put in a limited use/limited application (LU/LA) elevator between the basement and the second floor.
- Creating environmentally controlled storage for photographs, maps, textiles and artifacts outside of the vault. This requires ceiling the walls, installing new floors, installing fire production and a second HVAC system.

The Architects report included detailed scale drawings and estimates. The total cost of the project if done in 2013-14 was estimated to be \$1.7 million

Immediate Impact

The Archives Needs and Space Estimates Report has already had an impact on the management of the vaults. The survey of the large vault, confirmed by environmental monitoring data, showed damp conditions in the summer and a problem with mold on the spines of leather bindings. The Town funded remediation, the Town Engineer found the source of the problem (duct not working), and the Clerk moved permanent records to the

small vault, with better climate control, and exchanged them for records that were being held temporarily according retention schedules.

Staffing of the Archival Center was reorganized. Originally run by volunteers, the archives has a part-time reference archivist who reported to the Archives Advisory Committee Chair, who reported to the Assistant Town Manager, who does not have archival expertise. The Reference Archivist now reports directly to the Town Clerk who is responsible for a modest budget. The Archives Advisory Committee returns to an advisory roll. This reporting reflects common practice in most towns and acknowledges the overlap between the Archival Center collections and those of the Town Clerk.

An NEH grant is a significant achievement for a town of 20,000. We feel that its receipt has had a positive impact on our receipt of two grants, one for conservation of a stained glass window in the Sanborn House and the second for a new heating system (see Long-term Impact).

Long-term impact and Continuation of the Project

The Historical Society has integrated the plans for the basement into their master plan for the development of the Sanborn House as an historical and cultural center. In June 2013, it received a \$100,000 grant from the Cummings Foundation to replace the aged oil heating system with a modern energy-efficient gas system for the first and second floors. The basement has been emptied and asbestos abatement completed in preparation. Old oversized ducting will be removed and electrical systems upgraded. As recommended by the SBG, the southeast corner will be used as utility control center, leaving space for separate environmental controls for the basement.

The Town Clerk will incorporate the findings into her long-term planning for the management and storage of Town records, Space remains a problem in the historic Town Hall and the Sanborn House presents a viable option, but one that requires significant investment.

Funding will be the next challenge for both the Town and Historical Society. The Town is currently seeking funds for major renovation and expansion of the high school so it will fall to the Historical Society to take the lead in raising awareness and funds through its outreach program and publications.

The Society has been successful in raising funds for small to medium-sized projects for the Sanborn House by breaking projects into fundable units. It will need to review if this can be done with the SBG report. Perhaps the LU/LA can be funded separately by, for example, a Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Grant. The Society's Curator of Collections will work with the Town Clerk on an analysis of the collections in Town Hall to see if the photographs and private papers and maps can be separated from town records and moved to the Sanborn House with environmental control and fire protections systems but not a 6-hour vault as a second step. For more background, about the Historical Society, including finances, please see the entry at The Giving Common: <https://www.givingcommon.org/profile/1104681/>

The Historical Society is working on a strategic plan and will incorporate the architectural design report into a capital campaign scheduled to begin in 2014. Funding the Archival Center will be a public-private partnership and will require grants and public donations. The designs for new Archives will be critical for making the case to the public, foundations, agencies, and private individuals.

Conclusion

The project has shown that it is possible to incorporate principles of sustainable design into archival storage within an historic structure, but that legal and structural requirements limit options.

The report is critical for long-term planning for use of the Sanborn House and storage of Winchester's town records. We had been operating on the 2005 *Feasibility Study for Re-use of the Sanborn House*, funded by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. It proposed a meeting room and archives study center in the basement without adequately dealing with issues of access or storage requirements. We feel that now have a comprehensive study of the issues that will guide us as we move forward. We are particularly thankful that SBG was willing to take on our small but complicated project because of their extensive experience with historic preservation and museum/library storage.

We feel that the findings will assist other towns contemplating similar projects. When taking on the restoration of the Sanborn House, we found little information to guide us; we plan to share our experiences with the members of New England Archivists and the New England Museums Association at upcoming annual meetings.